

Thomas Jefferson to William H. Crawford, June 20, 1816, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO WILLIAM H. CRAWFORD J. MSS.

Monticello, June 20, 1816.

Dear Sir, —I am about to sin against all discretion, and knowingly, by adding to the drudgery of your letter-reading, this acknowledgment of the receipt of your favor of May the 31st, with the papers it covered. I cannot, however, deny myself the gratification of expressing the satisfaction I have received, not only from the general statement of affairs at Paris, in yours of December the 12th, 1814, (as a matter of history which I had not before received,) but most especially and superlatively, from the perusal of your letter of the 8th of the same month to Mr. Fisk, on the subject of draw-backs. This most heterogeneous principle was transplanted into ours from the British system, by a man whose mind was really powerful, but chained by native partialities to everything English; who had formed exaggerated ideas of the superior perfection of the English constitution, the superior wisdom of their government, and sincerely believed it for the good of this country to make them their model in everything; without considering that what might be wise and good for a nation essentially commercial, and entangled in complicated intercourse with numerous and powerful neighbors, might not be so for one essentially agricultural, and insulated by nature from the abusive governments of the old world.

The exercise, by our own citizens, of so much commerce as may suffice to exchange our superfluities for our wants, may be advantageous for the whole. But, it does not follow, that with a territory so boundless, it is the interest of the whole to become a mere city

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of London, to carry on the business of one half the world at the expense of eternal war with the other half. The agricultural capacities of our country constitute its distinguishing feature; and the adapting our policy and pursuits to that, is more likely to make us a numerous and happy people, than the mimicry of an Amsterdam, a Hamburg, or a city of London. Every society has a right to fix the fundamental principles of its association, and to say to all individuals, that, if they contemplate pursuits beyond the limits of these principles, and involving dangers which the society chooses to avoid, they must go somewhere else for their exercise; that we want no citizens, and still less ephemeral and pseudocitizens, on such terms. We may exclude them from our territory, as we do persons infected with disease.

Such is the situation of our country. We have most abundant resources of happiness within ourselves, which we may enjoy in peace and safety, without permitting a few citizens, infected with the mania of rambling and gambling, to bring danger on the great mass engaged in innocent and safe pursuits at home. In your letter to Fisk, you have fairly stated the alternatives between which we are to choose: 1, licentious commerce and gambling speculations for a few, with eternal war for the many; or, 2, restricted commerce, peace, and steady occupations for all. If any State in the Union will declare that it prefers separation with the first alternative, to a continuance in union without it, I have no hesitation in saying, "let us separate." I would rather the States should withdraw, which are for unlimited commerce and war, and confederate with those alone which are for peace and agriculture. I know that every nation in Europe would join in sincere amity with the latter, and hold the former at arm's length, by jealousies, prohibitions, restrictions, vexations and war. No earthly consideration could induce my consent to contract such a debt as England has by her wars for commerce, to reduce our citizens by taxes to such wretchedness, as that laboring sixteen of the twenty-four hours, they are still unable to afford themselves bread, or barely to earn as much oatmeal or potatoes as will keep soul and body together. And all this to feed the avidity of a few millionary merchants, and to keep up one thousand ships of war for the protection of their commercial speculations. I

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returned from Europe after our government had got under way, and had adopted from the British code the law of draw-backs. I early saw its effects in the jealousies and vexations of Britain; and that, retaining it, we must become like her an essentially warring nation, and meet, in the end, the catastrophe impending over her. No one can doubt that this alone produced the orders of council, the depredations which preceded, and the war which followed them. Had we carried but our own produce, and brought back but our own wants, no nation would have troubled us. Our commercial dashers, then, have already cost us so many thousand lives, so many millions of dollars, more than their persons and all their commerce were worth.

When war was declared, and especially after Massachusetts, who had produced it, took side with the enemy waging it, I pressed on some confidential friends in Congress to avail us of the happy opportunity of repealing the draw-back; and I do rejoice to find that you are in that sentiment. You are young, and may be in the way of bringing it into effect. Perhaps time, even yet, and change of tone, (for there are symptoms of that in Massachusetts,) may not have obliterated altogether the sense of our late feelings and sufferings; may not have induced oblivion of the friends we have lost, the depredations and conflagrations we have suffered, and the debts we have incurred, and have to labor for through the lives of the present generation. The earlier the repeal is proposed, the more it will be befriended by all these recollections and considerations. This is one of three great measures necessary to insure us permanent prosperity. This preserves our peace. A second should enable us to meet any war, by adopting the report of the war department, for placing the force of the nation at effectual command; and a third should insure resources of money by the suppression of all paper circulation during peace, and licensing that of the nation alone during war. The metallic medium of which we should be possessed at the commencement of a war, would be a sufficient fund for all the loans we should need through its continuance; and if the national bills issued, be bottomed (as is indispensable) on pledges of specific taxes for their redemption within certain and moderate epochs, and be of proper denominations for circulation, no interest on them

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would be necessary or just, because they would answer to every one the purposes of the metallic money withdrawn and replaced by them.

But possibly these may be the dreams of an old man, or that the occasions of realizing them may have passed away without return. A government regulating itself by what is wise and just for the many, uninfluenced by the local and selfish views of the few who direct their affairs, has not been seen perhaps, on earth. Or if it existed, for a moment, at the birth of ours, it would not be easy to fix the term of its continuance. Still, I believe it does exist here in a

greater degree than anywhere else; and for its growth and continuance, as well as for your personal health and happiness, I offer sincere prayers, with the homage of my respect and esteem.

END OF VOLUME XI